Church Sees Rejection Of Nixon Offer to Testify

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The chairman of the Senate Intelligence committee says he doubts his panel will agree to take testimony from Richard M. Nixon under the terms proposed by the former President.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) said in a telephone interview Wednesday that he is "doubtful that this can be worked out to the committee's satisfaction if the exchange is limited in the ways" Nixon attorney Herbert J. Miller suggested.

The Senate panel, investigating alleged wrongdoing by the nation's intelligence agencies, has long sought Nixon's testimony about spy operations carried out prior to his resignation as President.

But Nixon lawyers, in a letter to the committee, said Nixon would agree to testify only to "ranking members" of the committee and that he would reserve the right not to answer any questions he feels would violate executive privilege.

By "ranking members," it is assumed Nixon means he would speak only to Church and to Sen. John G. Tower (R-Tex.), vice chairman of the panel.

But Church said this would not sit well with the full panel. "It was the clear expression of the committee the last time we discussed the matter that the full committee should be involved," he said.

Church also said Nixon almost certainly would be required to testify under oath. That question was not addressed in the letter, although Nixon lawyer Stan Mortenson said the former President intended to talk in "an informal context."

The Nixon offer said the former President would meet with the ranking committee members at San Clemente, Calif., for a four-hour session sometime in January. Mortenson said the committee has specifically said it wants to question Nixon about the so-called Huston plan, which recommended a variety of illegal domestic intelligence gathering methods, and CIA surveillance of antiwar activists and other dissidents during Nixon's administration.

Mortenson denied a report that Nixon also is reserving the right to invoke the Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination.